

NUTRITION

Dietary Fiber

Defining Fiber and Its Role

Food fibers are that part of plant foods that are not digested when eaten. Since they are not absorbed into the body, dietary fibers are not a nutrient. Nevertheless, consumers are increasingly interested in the role that dietary fibers play in maintaining the body's health.

Fiber-rich foods help with constipation, hemorrhoids, and diverticular disease. Some types of fiber may have a cholesterol-lowering effect which could lead to reduced risk of heart disease. In addition, fiber may reduce the incidence of certain types of cancer, particularly those associated with the digestive tract and may be helpful in controlling diabetes.

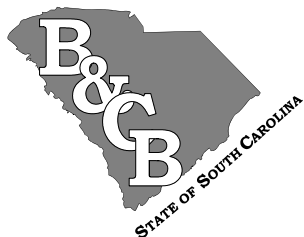
How Much Should You Eat?

Nutrition researchers and educators recommend that healthy adults consume between 20-35 grams of dietary fiber per day. According to current studies, American men and women eat about 11 grams of dietary fiber daily. If you plan to add more fiber to your diet, follow these steps:

- Start slowly.
- Add high-fiber foods gradually.
- Too much fiber at once may produce discomfort.
- Eat a variety of fiber-rich foods.

Drink plenty of fluids. Six to eight glasses a day will help reduce the risk of abdominal discomfort and intestinal blockage caused by too much fiber.

Get fiber from foods not pills. Food sources are more efficient and will supply additional nutrients. Excessive use of fiber supplements can lead to acute digestive problems and blockages. The American Dietetic Association advises that intakes greater than 50-60 grams a day can also block the absorption of some nutrients.



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